

POSSIBLE CHANGES TO REGULATIONS FOR COWNOSE RAYS

Cownose rays are a migratory species that range from Florida to New Jersey and use the Chesapeake Bay as nursery habitat between the months of May and October. Male cownose rays depart the Bay in late June – early July. Therefore, cownose rays present in the Bay after July 1 are predominantly pregnant females and young-of-the-year pups.

Based on the feedback that the Secretary of Natural Resources has received to date, the Department is clarifying the details of what is being considered. The scoping in November was not completely clear regarding where the restriction would apply or if the restriction applied to recreational and/or commercial user groups. The information being considered is slightly different for each user group because the authority that the Department has to regulate gear differs for recreational and commercial users. Projectile gear encompasses several types of gear for recreational users, but only archery equipment for commercial users. The following information is being considered for possible proposal in the spring of 2017.

Recreational

Prohibit the use of projectile gear (archery equipment, gig, spear and spear gun) for taking cownose rays during the period from July 1 through December 31. This statement is authorized by statute (Natural Resources Article, §4-221, Annotated Code of Maryland), would be added to Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 08.02.25.03, and would apply to all recreational anglers in all state waters. The restriction is for all projectile gear because the rules for projectile gear are the same; therefore, it doesn't make sense to restrict only archery equipment.

Commercial

Prohibit the use of archery equipment for taking cownose rays during the period from July 1 through December 31. This statement is authorized by statute (Natural Resources Article, §4-221, Annotated Code of Maryland), would be added to Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 08.02.25.04*, and would apply to all commercial harvesters in all state waters.

* COMAR 08.02.25.04 is still in the development stage and is scheduled to be printed in the Maryland Register at the end of January 2017.